NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0320 MARCH 8, 1976
ANITA CHAPMAN

FOCUS: WRIGHT PATMAN OF TEXAS

ANNCR:

AN INTERESTING AND CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE IN THE AMERICAN CONGRESS IS DEAD. WRIGHT PATMAN REPRESENTED THE FIRST DISTRICT OF TEXAS IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES FOR MORE THAN FOUR DECADES. HERE WITH MORE ON HIM NOW, VOA'S ANITA CHAPMAN:

VOICE:

THE "OLD POPULIST" IS HOW PEOPLE ARE DESCRIBING WRIGHT PATMAN, WHO DIED SUNDAY AT THE AGE OF EIGHTY-TWO. THE TERM GOES BACK TO THE LAST CENTURY, AND REFERS TO A POLITICIAN WHO IS CONCERNED WITH THE INTERESTS OF THE LITTLE PEOPLE.

REPRESENTATIVE PATMAN SPENT FORTY-EIGHT YEARS IN THE LOWER HOUSE OF CONGRESS. AND DURING THEM ALL, HE TENACIOUSLY FOUGHT AGAINST WHAT HE FELT WAS CONCENTRATION OF POWER IN THE HANDS OF A FEW BANKERS, BUSINESSMEN AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. OVER THE YEARS HE NIBBLED AWAY AT PRACTICES WHICH TO HIM APPEARED DETRIMENTAL TO MILLIONS OF SMALL BUSINESSMEN AND FARMERS. HIS PARTICULAR OBJECT OF WRATH IN RECENT YEARS WAS THE FEDERAL RESERVE BOARD, WHICH HE FELT WAS MUCH TOO INDEPENDENT OF CONGRESSIONAL CONTROL AND MUCH TOO FRIENDLY WITH THE FINANCIAL ELITE.

PATMAN CAME FROM A BACKGROUND WHERE MISTRUST OF BIG FINANCIAL INTERESTS CAN COME SOMEWHAT NATURALLY. HIS FATHER WAS A POOR COTTON FARMER WHOSE FAMILY HAD SETTLED IN A REMOTE PART OF NORTHEAST TEXAS. THE PLACE CAME TO BE

KNOWN AS PATMAN'S SWITCH, AFTER THE FAMILY. IT NO LONGER EXISTS BUT THE EGALITARIAN FRONTIER QUALITIES OF THE AREA REMAINED WITH WRIGHT PATMAN.

AFTER SEVERAL YEARS OF LAW PRACTICE PATMAN WAS APPOINTED DISTRICT ATTORNEY FOR HIS COUNTY. FROM THE HE WENT INTO HIS FIRST ELECTIVE POST, IN THE TEXAS STATE LEGISLATURE. IT WAS IN NINETEEN TWENTY-EIGHT, ONE YEAR BEFORE THE DEVASTATING ECONOMIC DEPRESSION, THAT HE WAS ELECTED TO THE NATIONAL CONGRESS, THE FIRST OF TWENTY-EIGHT ELECTIONS THAT GAVE HIM A TENURE MAKING HIM AT HIS DEATH, THE DEAN OF THE LOWER HOUSE OF CONGRESS. (OPT) THE ECONOMIC DEPRESSION SHARPENED PATMAN'S AWARENESS OF THE NEED TO REGULATE THE FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS OF THE COUNTRY. AND SOME CREDIT HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH AN OUTSTANDING SUPREME COURT JUSTICE, LOUIS BRANDEIS, AS A FORCE IN SHAPING HIS PHILOSOPHY. (END OPT)

PATMAN HAD A NUMBER OF LEGISLATIVE SUCCESSES OVER THE YEARS. MOST NOTABLE WAS THE NINETEEN FORTY-SIX FULL EMPLOYMENT ACT THAT CREATED THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS. HE WORKED TEN YEARS TO PASS THIS LEGISLATION. AND INDEED, THAT QUALITY OF STUBBORNNESS WAS PERHAPS HIS GREATEST STRENGTH, AND TO HIS ENEMIES, HIS GREATEST WEAPON. OVER AND OVER, COLLEAGUES VOTED DOWN HIS PROPOSALS. YET IN THE NEXT WEEK, THE NEXT MONTH, THE NEXT YEAR, IN THE SAME OR ALTERED FORM, THE PROPOSALS RE-EMERGED THROUGH HIS INITIATIVE.

PATMAN WAS A MOVING FORCE IN SETTING UP FEDERALLY-BACKED CREDIT UNIONS FOR GOVERNMENT WORKERS. THESE NOW HAVE THIRTY-TWO MILLION MEMBERS. HE CURBED THE POWER OF BIG CHAIN STORES

TO CUT PRICES TO FORCE SMALL COMPETITORS OUT OF BUSINESS. HE SET UP THE SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION TO WHICH THOUSANDS OF FLEDGLING COMPANIES TURN FOR ADVICE AND KNOW-HOW. HIS INVESTIGATION OF TAX-EXEMPT FOUNDATIONS, WITH THEIR MILLIONS OF EXPENDABLE MONEY, REVEALED ABUSES THAT WERE CONTROLLED BY LATER LEGISLATION. AND OBITUARY WRITERS ARE REMEMBERING THAT IT WAS HE, THREE MONTHS AFTER THE WATERGATE BREAK-IN, WHO CALLED FOR INVESTIGATION BY HIS BANKING AND CURRENCY COMMITTEE, OF HOW NIXON CAMPAIGN FUNDS COULD END UP IN THE POCKETS OF THE BURGLARS. PRESSURE FROM THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION RESULTED IN KILLING THE INVESTIGATION.

PATMAN HAD NOT INTENDED TO RUN AGAIN. IN JANUARY HE SPOKE TO HIS CONSTITUENTS AND SUMMED UP HIS WORK. I TRIED ALWAYS TO VOTE FOR YOU IN CONGRESS, HE SAID.

IT'S NOT ONLY HIS CONSTITUENTS WHO WILL REMEMBER WHAT HE DID, BUT ALL THOSE WHO HAVE BENEFITTED FROM HIS TIRELESS EFFORTS. AS THE HOUSE SPEAKER, CARL ALBERT, SAID OF HIM YESTERDAY: "NO MEMBER DURING THIS CENTURY WILL MAKE A MORE ENDURING IMPACT."

JS/LP